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Best-Selling Ballads and the Female Voices of Thomas Deloney

It is even easier to make the case for broadside ballads of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as an inherently oral and aural form of literature than for other genres because they were so clearly designed, promoted and consumed as songs. Most of these cheap single-sheet publications specified a tune, and the itinerant individuals who sold them were commonly known as “ballad-singers.” Much recent work has emphasised the sounded nature of balladry, reacting against previous scholarship that tended to treat metrical broadsides as a species of (presumably) silent poetry.¹ Ballads were sung in a wide variety of contexts: by professional distributors in marketplaces and at public executions; by people at work, particularly where their labour had a rhythmic aspect (milkmaids and weavers were well-known for their singing); by individuals and groups in alehouses, where the sheets often adorned the walls; and by gentlefolk and their servants in the comfort of the manor house.² Ballads were set up for performance, and many included lines that helped the singer to gather a listening audience.³ Men and women alike sang ballads though they surely engaged with the genre in different ways. Any song could be carried off in a variety of different interpretative directions, depending on numerous factors including the sexual identity that shaped each different voice and the mode of performance.⁴ Of course, ballads could also be read in private but their aurality is so strongly indicated in such an array of contemporary commentary that one wonders whether it was ever truly possible to silence them. When Samuel Pepys read a ballad, apparently to himself, during a trip across the Thames, is it not likely that he heard the song’s famous tune within his musical mind?⁵

Nobody wrote ballads like Thomas Deloney. His fame as England’s top songsmith at the close of the sixteenth century is clear. Even after the appearance in print of Deloney’s now more famous prose works, the actor William Kemp still referred – admittedly with a measure of sarcasm –

¹ See, for example, Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago, 1999), ch. 7; Christopher Marsh, “The Sound of Print in Early Modern England: the Broadside Ballad as Song,” in *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300-1700*, ed. Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge, 2004), 171-90; Una McIlvenna, “The Power of Contrafactum in Execution Ballads,” *Past and Present* 229, no. 1 (2015): 47-89.

² On the culture of balladry in general, see: Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991), chs. 1-3; Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), chs. 5 and 6; Angela McShane, “Ballads and Broadside,” in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture* (vol. 1). *Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*, ed. Joad Raymond (Oxford, 2011), 339-62; *Broadside Ballads from the Pepys Collection: A Selection of Texts, Approaches, and Recordings*, ed. Patricia Fumerton (Tempe, 2012), 3-49.

³ This aspect of balladry is emphasised in Natascha Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad, 1550-1650* (Cambridge, 1981).

⁴ The transformative power of performance is discussed by Michelle O’Callaghan in her essay for this volume (see above/below, pp. XX-XX).

⁵ *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. R. C. Latham and W. Matthews, 11 vols. (London, 1971), vol. 8, 99.

to “the great ballet-maker T. D. alias Thomas Deloney.”⁶ His commercial success accounts for the fact that, during the 1590s and for many decades afterwards, collections of his songs were also issued in book form under the titles *Strange Histories* and *The Garland of Good Will* (in several cases, these provide the earliest surviving versions of Deloney’s songs because extant copies of the broadsides often date from the decades following his death). The current chapter grows out of a research project that aims to identify, display and record 120 of seventeenth-century England’s most successful songs, and the exercise is confirming that Deloney, though he apparently died in 1600, was the leading ballad-maker of this age.⁷ Seven of the 120 songs were written by him, and he easily outscored every other known author (most ballads were published anonymously but the works of the better-known composers were sometimes attributed to them on the sheets or in other sources). Deloney made his primary living as a silk-weaver in London, and it seems certain that his secondary career as an author was motivated by the exceptionally difficult economic times that he and others of his craft endured during the closing years of the sixteenth century.⁸ His songs proved more successful than his silk, and the most effective of them began as hits and evolved into classics, remaining highly popular for decades, even centuries. He played a vital role in the history of English popular music, a field of scholarship within which we read plenty about the 1950s but not enough about the 1590s. Modern scholars may not find Deloney’s songs aesthetically pleasing but their success in his own day and for years afterwards suggests that they were well-equipped with the cultural effectiveness that Oskar Cox Jensen, writing of popular music in a later century, has termed “fitness.”⁹

An equally remarkable fact is that every one of Deloney’s seven best-selling songs focuses heavily upon female characters. Six of the seven songs name these characters in their titles, and the remaining ballad features a gaggle of young women as the main drivers of the action even though they are not mentioned at the top. It is also interesting – given our focus on voices – that most of the lines of direct speech in these highly successful songs are attributed to women. The seven

⁶ William Kemp, *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (London, 1600), D3v.

⁷ Criteria for selection include the following: the number of known editions and their temporal density; the number of surviving copies; evidence that efforts were made by publishers to license individual songs and protect their copyright; the capacity of songs to generate new titles for old tunes; and the survival of songs into the vernacular repertoire in later centuries. Our recordings are being made by The Carnival Band (with invited guests).

⁸ On Deloney’s biography, see: *The Works of Thomas Deloney*, ed. Francis Oscar Mann (Oxford, 1912), introduction; Frances Consitt, *The London Weavers’ Company* (Oxford, 1933), 147, 316, 318; Meritt E. Lawlis, *The Novels of Thomas Deloney* (Bloomington, 1961); Eugene P. Wright, *Thomas Deloney* (Boston, 1981); Roze Hentschell, “Clothworkers and Social Protest: the Case of Thomas Deloney,” *Comitatus* 31, no. 1 (2001): 43-67; Roger A. Ladd, “Thomas Deloney and the London Weavers’ Company,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 32, no. 4 (2001): 981-1001; John Carpenter, “Placing Thomas Deloney,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36, no. 2 (2006): 125-62.

⁹ *Works of Thomas Deloney*, ed. Mann, xxxviii; Oskar Cox Jensen, *Napoleon and British Song, 1797-1822* (Basingstoke, 2015), 2.

ballads include 623 such lines and 358 of them, or 58%, emerge from the mouths of women. Here, we are borrowing a crude but indicative technique from the popular analysis of modern feature films which establishes, incidentally, that the most commercially successful movies of the last fifty years are far less generous to female voices than was Thomas Deloney.¹⁰ If we compare Deloney's top songs with all 120 of our seventeenth-century hits, it becomes even clearer that he allowed a notable prominence to female voices. In the wider group of songs by all authors, only 28% of 8558 lines are spoken by women. Female characters in Deloney's seven hits therefore deliver a proportion of the spoken lines that is more than twice as high as that found in other successful ballads. And if we set Deloney's best-performing ballads alongside his output as a whole, it can be suggested that consumers must have preferred the songs with voluble female characters. In the 39 ballads attributed to Deloney that do not feature on our list, only 25% of lines were spoken by women.¹¹ Clearly, songs that focused upon female characters and attributed to them a majority of the spoken lines were much more likely than Deloney's other known efforts to achieve conspicuous commercial success. The figures almost certainly reveal to us the importance and the purchasing power of the female portion of the market for ballads, a phenomenon that is clearly suggested by other evidence. "Milkmaids" and "country wenches" were identified as prominent consumers of balladry, and many of the songs from our list include appeals to "maidens," "dainty dames," and "you women."¹² The importance of female consumption is also suggested by recent work on the efforts made by other ballad-writers to present material that would appeal to women, and by research that emphasises the extent of female musical participation more generally. Of particular note is Scott Trudell's argument that the ayres of Thomas Campion were heavily influenced by his awareness of musical women and their taste for "female persona lyrics."¹³

Not all of Deloney's speaking women were quite so successful, however, and it is interesting to consider the possibility that his remarkable ballad-writing career was topped and tailed by two potentially controversial exercises in appropriating the voice of Elizabeth I herself. In 1588, he got

¹⁰ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/04/12/the-problem-with-almost-all-movies/> (accessed 30 August 2016).

¹¹ I have counted all the ballads presented in *Works of Thomas Deloney*, ed. Mann (but not including songs that were integrated into Deloney's prose works).

¹² See the sources presented in the appendix to Würzbach, *Rise of the English Street Ballad*, particularly 263-4, 266, 275, 278, 279, 280-2; *A Godly Warning for All Maidens* (1686-88), EBBA 20238; *The Wofull Complaint* (c. 1625), EBBA 20165. Facsimile images of most of the songs discussed in this chapter can be found in the online English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA). Searching by the EBBA number cited with each song is the quickest way to find the relevant editions. All the ballads cited were published in London.

¹³ Sandra Clark, "The Broadside Ballad and the Woman's Voice," in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England 1500-1700*, ed. Christina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (Basingstoke, 2002), 103-20; Linda Phyllis Austern, "Women's Musical Voices in Sixteenth-Century England," *Early Modern Women* 3 (2008): 127-52; Scott A. Trudell, "Performing Women in English Books of Ayres," in *Gender and Song in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2014), ed. Leslie C. Dunn and Katherine R. Larson, 15-29. See also the essays in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women*, ed. Thomasin LaMay (Aldershot, 2005).

away with it, publishing a song about the queen's visit to the military camp at Tilbury in the year of the Spanish Armada (the ballad survives but was not apparently reprinted).¹⁴ Towards its conclusion, Elizabeth addresses the troops directly, urging courage and asserting solidarity:

But if our enimies do assaile you,
never let your stomackes faile you.
For in the midst of all your troupe,
we our selves will be in place.

Amidst the frenzied patriotism of 1588, Deloney's act of royal ventriloquism provoked no official concern. Eight years later, however, he attempted the same trick again in the very different circumstances generated by crop failure, grain shortage, popular unrest and elite anxiety. The ballad itself is lost but we do know that it caused considerable concern to the Mayor of London, Stephen Slaney. On 25 July 1596, Slaney wrote to Lord Burghley, reporting that "an idle fellowe" named Deloney had composed "a Complaint of the great want & scarcitie of Corn." Slaney explained that the ballad contained "certein vaine & presumptuous matter bringing in hir highnes to speak with her people in Dialogue wise in very fond and undecent sort." It seems that Deloney's queen spoke out to insist on the enforcement of existing government orders "for the remedying of the dearth of Corn" but, according to Slaney, her words were presented "in that vaine & indiscreet manner as that thearby the poor may aggravate their grieffe & take occasion of soom discontent." Slaney had taken measures against the publishers of the ballad but had so far been unable to track down Deloney himself. He noted, rightly, that Deloney had also been playing a vigorous role in standing up for London's poorer weavers against the encroachment of foreign craftsmen and the irresponsible conduct of the richer individuals who were supposed to control the business through their domination of the livery company. In 1595, Deloney had spent a period in Newgate for his activities and, a year on, he was clearly determined not to be caught again.¹⁵ The controversial corn ballad has been credited with driving Deloney away from verse and into the prose for which he is now more frequently remembered.¹⁶ In fact, there is no reason to suppose that he gave up ballad-writing completely in the years before his death in 1600, but the period he spent on the Mayor's "most wanted" list must at least have given him pause for thought. There were some female voices with which it was best not to experiment.

¹⁴ *A Joyful New Ballad, Declaring the Happie Obtaining of the Great Galleazzo* (1588).

¹⁵ British Library, Lansdowne Mss., vol. 81, fo. 76. On Deloney's imprisonment, see the documents transcribed in Consitt, *The London Weavers' Company*, 312-18.

¹⁶ Carpenter, "Placing Thomas Deloney," 145.

Very little has hitherto been written about the female voices in Deloney's ballads, though the representation of women in his prose works has generated widely divergent opinions. Some have remarked on "sincere admiration of a good wife" and his portrayal of women as colourful and influential. Others note how Deloney's characters participate in English literature's "timeless battle of the sexes" with its essentially harmless knockabout characteristics.¹⁷ Some commentators, however, adopt a more critical line, arguing that Deloney, as a member of the Company of Weavers, was implicated in the exclusion of women from the craft and that his prose works are to be understood within the same context.¹⁸ Overall, therefore, Deloney has been found both to idealise and to demonise women. The slipperiness that this implies is also mirrored in contradictory readings of his attitude to the social order more generally. The nostalgic air of the proto-novel, *Jack of Newbury*, has made it appear to some an essay in defence of old-fashioned hierarchical social values and to others a coded assault upon the *status quo*. The genius of the work was probably that it was amenable to a number of different interpretations. As John Carpenter has argued, Deloney's style involved the representation of "multiple potential positions" as a way of ensuring that his potential market or audience was not unduly restricted.¹⁹

This chapter focuses intensively upon Deloney's seven best-selling ballads, and particularly on the ways in which these songs represent the voices of women. It will also consider the motives underlying Deloney's approach to female characterisation and the related motives that may have driven consumers, particularly women, to purchase and perform his songs.²⁰ The interpretative approaches adopted by consumers are notoriously difficult to investigate but in the case of these seven songs we at least know that they enjoyed a popularity and a longevity that went far beyond the ordinary. Of course, there is no escaping the fact that we have here a man who was presuming to imitate the voices of women. Such early-modern acts of "transvestite ventriloquism" or "male appropriations of the feminine voice" are understandably heard by modern scholars with a measure of suspicion. According to Elizabeth Harvey, they contributed to "a larger cultural silencing of women" and involved "a cultural suppression of the female voice." The purpose was "to mute or

¹⁷ Lawlis, *Novels of Thomas Deloney*, xviii-xxi; Wright, *Thomas Deloney*, 39-40, 110-11; Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore, 1987), 224.

¹⁸ Joan Pong Linton, "Jack of Newbery and Drake in California: Domestic and Colonial Narratives of English Cloth and Manhood," *English Literary History* 59, no. 1 (1992): 25; Rosemary Kegl, *The Rhetoric of Concealment. Figuring Gender and Class in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, 1994), 151-4; Ladd, "Thomas Deloney and the London Weavers' Company," 993.

¹⁹ *Works of Thomas Deloney*, ed. Mann, xiv; Alexandra Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print. Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1997) ch. 4; Hentschell, "Clothworkers and Social Protest"; Carpenter, "Placing Thomas Deloney," 126.

²⁰ Michelle O'Callaghan argues, on the basis of evidence supplied by the Elizabethan publisher Richard Jones, that women were "vital to this ballad economy." See below/above, p. XX.

shape feminine speaking.”²¹ Despite the force of this argument, there is a case for adopting a different perspective, at least where Thomas Deloney is concerned. While he certainly did aspire to “shape feminine speaking,” it is much less clear that he hoped to “mute” it. Gina Bloom’s emphasis upon the materiality of language, the instabilities of literary voice and the importance of the “performative dimension” of any text is important here too.²² Deloney wrote down the words, but the words, once written, took off again and flew around with an energy of their own. If they were ever truly his, they did not remain so for long. The ballad-form in particular, with its in-built performativity, may actually have had the effect of opening up vocal possibilities for women and actively inviting them to speak through song. If Deloney stole the voices of women, he did so in a manner that invited women to take them back again. Recent theoretical attention to the “active audience” suggests that the producers of cultural materials are not the only ones capable of manipulation.²³ Deloney needed consumers to respond energetically if his flagging economic prospects in the silk-weaving business were to be countered by his bold strategy of diversification. He was trying to raise a family in the crowded and deprived London parish of St. Giles Cripplegate, where the parish registers for the fairly typical year of 1586 record 254 baptisms and 232 burials (sadly, his son Richard appeared on both lists).²⁴ During the last decade of the sixteenth century, Deloney’s most successful enterprise involved not the weaving of fine silk for female clothing but the manufacture of female voices in forms that women evidently felt motivated to make their own.

Ballads of the late sixteenth century are notoriously difficult to date with precision and we do not know the precise order in which Deloney composed his seven super-songs in the years between 1586 and 1600. Here, they will instead be placed in a sequence that begins with his most passive female character and proceeds towards his most assertive. We therefore open with a song *Of patient Grissel and a Noble Marquess*. This appeared in Deloney’s collection, *The Garland of Good*

²¹ Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices. Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London, 1992), 1, 12, 16, 142. See also Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville, 1992), 48-9, and *An Anthology of Ancient and Medieval Women’s Song*, ed. Anne L. Klinck (Basingstoke, 2004), 133.

²² Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion. Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, 2007), 2, 4, 8, 13, 187.

²³ See, for example, Stuart Hall, “Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse,” in Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language* (London, 1980), 117-27; David Morley, “Active Audience Theory: Pendulums and Pitfalls,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (Autumn, 1993): 13-19; Jin Huimin, “British Cultural Studies, Active Audience Theory and the Status of Cultural Theory: An Interview with David Morley,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 28, no. 4 (July 2011): 124-44. On the active audience in popular music, see Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory. An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1996), ch. 1.

²⁴ London Metropolitan Archives, Parish Registers of St. Giles Cripplegate, London.

Will, but it was also issued numerous times as a broadside with titles such as *A most excellent and vertuous Ballad of the Patient Grissell*.²⁵ The eponymous character voices only 32 of the 98 lines of direct speech (33%), a statistic that is perhaps not surprising, given the nature of this famous tale. Grissell was, of course, an archetype of female forbearance, already well known from the writings of Boccaccio, Petrarch, Chaucer and others.²⁶ In all versions, she patiently endures a series of horrific ordeals imposed by a husband who feels compelled to test her constancy, sometimes for his own personal satisfaction and sometimes because he is put under pressure by others. Deloney, then, was appropriating a well-established literary character, and the high number of editions and surviving copies makes it clear that this was soon a hit. It seems that Thomas Dekker and others may have reacted to the popularity of the song by writing a play on the same subject.²⁷

In the ballad, Deloney is careful to avoid telling listeners precisely what he wishes them to think of Grissell. He deliberately sidesteps the controversial question of whether or not England's wives could actually be expected to emulate her extreme passivity under pressure. Chaucer had assured the women of his own era that imitation of Grissell was an impossibility. The author of a seventeenth-century chapbook disagreed, urging English maids to live "by her example." He also considered it necessary, however, to repudiate objections about "the impossibility of the story" and "the absurdity of the example."²⁸ It appears that Grissell's relevance to contemporary life was a talking point rather than an established certainty. The same might be said in relation to her husband's conduct. Chaucer and Dekker both made it far clearer than Deloney did that the marquis was a domestic tyrant. It is interesting that Deloney tends to stay out of these debates, recounting the story but avoiding the urge to direct his potential consumers. This may well have been a commercially-motivated tactic that aimed to stimulate debate without seeking to dominate it. Ballad banter was good for sales.

Grissell's voice, though used sparingly, plays a crucial role in the unfolding of Deloney's musical narrative. At the very start, the marquis rides past Grissell's humble country cottage and is stopped in his tracks not only by her beauty but by the music she makes: "She sung full sweet, with pleasant voyce melodiously,/ which set the Lords heart on fire." It is her voice that enflames him, and he resolves immediately to make Grissell his wife. Subsequently, however, the marquis' behaviour is more strongly influenced by the voices of others who "murmur" at his choice of spouse

²⁵ The quotations in this section are from T[homas] D[eloney], *The Garland of Good Will* (originally licensed, 1593; first extant edition, 1628), E7r-F2v. Several copies of the broadside appear under variant titles in EBBA (30210, 20160, 35510, 33583, 31768, 20247).

²⁶ For an overview, see Judith Bronfman, "Grizelda, Renaissance Woman," in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print*, ed. Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (Amherst, 1990), 211-23.

²⁷ Thomas Dekker, *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grisill* (London, 1603).

²⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1951), 353; *The Antient, True, and Admirable History of Patient Grissel* (London, 1619), title page and ch. 8 (unpaginated).

on account of her poverty: "Some said this, and some said that,/ Some did call her beggars brat." The challenge of finding love across various cultural boundaries was a highly successful theme for Deloney, and other examples will be encountered below. The marquis, responding to the disquiet, devises a series of tests through which he plans to prove to the world that Grissell, though poor, is virtuous beyond compare. As the tests unfold, Grissell's own voice remains remarkably restrained and concise. When the marquis tells her, for example, that he plans to kill their two children, she wrings her hands in anguish but says only, "my gracious Lord must have his will obeyd."

The only exception to this rule of monumental taciturnity occurs when Grissell is forced to say farewell to her children in the presence of the servant sent by the marquis to collect them. She blames herself for the horror that is unfolding ("you must die for my unworthinesse") but she also addresses the marquis' agent in uncharacteristically angry terms: "Come messenger of death, said she,/ Take my despised Babes to thee,/ and to their father my complaints expresse." There are no "complaints" in the other versions of the story, though Grissell's pain is usually apparent, and it seems possible that Deloney's intervention tells us something about the imagined sympathies of his female consumers. The speech that Grissell makes at this point in the narrative is over three times as long as her second most substantial contribution, and it is followed by a swift resumption of reticence. When the marquis tells her that the children are dead and asks for her response, she says, "Sith you my Lord are pleasd with it,/Poore Grissell thinkes the action fit." She is finally rendered mute when her husband decides to strip her of courtly "Silke and Velvet" – a nod at Deloney's other occupation – and banish her back to her lowly life in the countryside: "She nothing said, no words of discontent/ did from her lips arise." In this manner, Deloney uses Grissell's extraordinary reticence as a key indicator of her capacity to endure suffering. Like a good woman, she falls silent.

This is a song of extremes. Grissell must demonstrate implausible patience only because her husband drives his authority beyond its proper limit. Deloney tells the tale but, probably with good reason, resists the temptation to moralise. The melody to which the ballad was set also played an important part in shaping and framing the song's extraordinary contrasts. Unfortunately, it survives only in a fragment – probably the opening - but there is enough to indicate that this was an upbeat tune with a bright feel to it. Its title, "The Brides good morrow," reinforces this point, for the melody was taken from an earlier song that describes the unrestrained joy of a young woman on her wedding day.²⁹ For listeners and performers who knew the tune and remembered the original ballad, its attachment to Grissell's story may have functioned either to amplify the contrast between

²⁹ *The Brides Good-morrow* (c. 1619), EBBA 30019. The tune-fragment can be found in Claude Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music* (New Brunswick, 1966), pp. 66-7. Oddly, the EBBA recording treats the fragment as a complete tune, repeating it over and over again in order to fill the verses.

the happiness of one bride and the suffering of another or to deliver a subconscious reassurance that all would be well in the end. And so it proved. Grissell passes all the tests and is summoned back to court for congratulation and adulation. She is reunited with her children – who are not dead after all – and she listens quietly as the marquis sings in praise “of patient Grissel, my most constant wife.” She, more than any of Deloney’s other successful female characters, lives her life in a state of extreme subjugation, and one wonders whether Deloney’s unwillingness to push the most obvious interpretation of the case allowed an alternative view – in which Grissel was esteemed not because she obeyed her husband but because she refused to be broken by him – to enjoy considerable currency. Sadly, ballad-consumers of the early modern period were not in the habit of telling historians how they understood the songs that they overheard.

In *A Mournfull Dittie, on the Death of Rosamond, K. Henry the Seconds Concubine*, we encounter another loving and deferential woman, defined by her relationship to a man, but this is passivity with a twist. Rosamund is no Grissell, for Deloney here enters the world of Henry II’s mistress, famously protected from the fury of Queen Eleanor by being housed in a secret bower at Woodstock in Oxfordshire. Eventually, while the king is away fighting in France, the Queen tracks Rosamund down and forces her to drink poison. Deloney thus represents two women: a concubine, whom we are invited to admire for her devotion and beauty; and a lawful wedded wife whom we are encouraged to condemn for her vengeful cruelty. The complexities of this scenario may help to explain the popularity of the song, evident in its appearance as the first item in *The Garland of Good Will* and its frequent publication in broadside form.³⁰

The ballad’s contrasting female voices are interesting. Statistically, the women approach parity with the men by delivering 33 of the 71 lines of direct speech (46%). Indeed, it is the prominence of spoken dialogue that sets Deloney’s ballad apart from other versions of the story that were published during and after his lifetime.³¹ In the first half, for example, the deep love that binds king and concubine is extensively voiced as they meet together for the last time in the secrecy of the bower. Henry speaks as the protector of his perfectly delicate flower, and she weeps at the news that he must go away. Naïvely, she offers to disguise herself as his page and travel in his retinue. In this role, she envisages a confused combination of masculine and feminine duties, carrying his shield by day in order to protect him from blows and preparing “sweet baths” to refresh him at night. Henry turns down this tempting offer, refusing to bend even when Rosamund exclaims, “But wanting you, my life is death,/ which doth true love abuse.” He tells her to reside safely in her

³⁰ My quotations are from D[eloney], *Garland of Good Will*, A2v-6v. Broadside editions usually appeared as *A Lamentable Ballad of Fair Rosamond* (EBBA 20235 and 31786).

³¹ Richard Grafton, *A Chronicle at Large* (London, 1569), 76-7; Raphael Holinshed, *The Third Volume of Chronicles* (London, 1586), 115; Samuel Daniel, *Delia. Contayning Certayne Sonnets* (London, 1592), H3r-M3v; *The Life and Death of Rosamond* (London, 1686-88).

bower and “dance the Galliard of my love,/ while I my foes do smite.” The object of his love is, like Grissell, rendered voiceless by disappointment: “And Rosamond for inward griefe,/ not one plaine word could speake.”

The second half of the ballad introduces the voice of the “furious” Queen Eleanor, who travels to Woodstock, incapacitates Rosamund’s guard and finds her way into the heart of the labyrinthine bower by following the thread that he has laid as an aid to his own navigation. Eleanor’s voice expresses pure malice and is unique within Deloney’s seven hit songs. Where Rosamund is warm and effusive, the Queen delivers her orders in cold, clipped terms and she voices only four lines:

Cast off thy Robes from thee, she said,
that rich and costly be:
And drinke thee up this deadly draught
which I have brought for thee.

Rosamund, by this stage, has regained her voice, and she begs womanfully for her life. “Take pittie on my youthfull yeares,” she says, before promising either to “renounce this sinful life,/ and in a Cloister bide” or go into exile “to range the world so wide.” She admits her fault but claims to have been “forc’d thereto” (the only direct reference to the inequalities of power that may have led to her relationship with the king). Rosamund throws herself on the Queen’s mercy but experiences a very hard landing. She cries to God, drinks the poison and swiftly dies.

Deloney did not design or choose the woodcuts that appear on surviving copies of this ballad – all of which date from the years after his death – but they nevertheless deserve consideration because of the manner in which they depict vocality. On the edition published by Thackeray and Passinger in the 1680s, for example, the picture-scheme is clear: on the left, the King and Rosamund stand together in a chamber, guarded by the knight whom Henry has appointed for her protection, and the body-language suggests clearly that the lovers are in animated conversation; and on the right, a second woodcut shows us Queen Eleanor standing over a kneeling Rosamund and gesticulating angrily, presumably commanding her to drink the goblet of poison that rests in her hand. One can almost hear the fraught exchanges, and the combination has the effect of representing the song as a juxtaposition of two very different conversations that are nevertheless connected by the imploring and deferential voice of Rosamund. Sadly for her, this voice proves no more successful in changing the Queen’s mind than it had earlier been in changing that of the King.³²

³² *Lamentable Ballad* (1686-88), EBBA 20235.

The tune to which the ballad was set may have had a more surprising influence because of its strong associations with an exceptionally well-known and intensely masculine song about the medieval confrontation between the Earls of Percy and Douglas at Chevy Chase.³³ Deloney's choice had the curious effect of forging a link between the manly clash of the Earls and the womanly confrontation between Rosamund and Eleanor. Both had a monumental, larger-than-life quality, and both ended badly.

Any suggestion that Deloney's principal aim was to sell songs about women who were either passive or poisonous is contradicted, or at least complicated, by our next example. *The Dutchesse of Suffolkes Calamitie* told the tale of Catherine Willoughby, a Protestant aristocrat who fled England during the reign of Mary I, enduring great hardships in Flanders and Germany before returning home in 1558. Her noble example was celebrated by John Foxe, and it is clear that Deloney made use of this famous account, though he both embellished and reduced it. The ballad appeared in Deloney's collection, *Strange Histories*, and it survives in a number of later broadside versions. Its status as a hit is also suggested by the fact that the earliest surviving edition of *Strange Histories* picks it out for special mention on the title page.³⁴ Oddly, Deloney's Duchess speaks only one line, though it constitutes 33% of the direct speech that features in the ballad because Deloney – uniquely in this group of seven songs – hardly uses such speech at all. One wonders whether this policy of uncharacteristic avoidance may have been a response to the hot water in which he found himself after putting words into the mouth of the Queen. The Duchess' only line is delivered at a moment of particularly painful bedragglements on her continental travels: to her supportive husband, she says, "O that we had some fier heere," and he duly sets to work without saying anything at all. There are other ways, however, in which the concept of voice might be discussed in relation to this best-selling song.

Whether or not Deloney was suddenly anxious about the dangers of speaking for aristocrats, the Duchess' reticence can be considered a facet of her own survival strategy. She was, after all, a woman of high breeding, driven by religious persecution to disguise herself and her baby "in poore array" in order to escape from England without being recognised. The wrong clothes might have given the game away, but so too might the wrong mode of speech. Partly for this reason, most of the references to the Duchess' voice are either indirect or non-verbal. At the outset, for example, she is identified as one of the heroic individuals "that did Gods Word professe" and who had to flee

³³ *A Memorable Song upon the Unhappy Hunting in Chevy Chase* (c. 1630), EBBA 20279. Elizabethan editions of the ballad are lost. For the tune, see Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, 96-101.

³⁴ John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London, 1583), 2102-3. My quotations are from [Thomas Deloney], *Strange Histories* (originally 1590s; earliest surviving edition, 1602), A5v-8r. Surviving broadsides are usually entitled *The Most Rare and Excellent History of the Dutchesse of Suffolkes Calamity* (EBBA 20260, 30064, 31743, 31744, 33972, 35427). The ballad is also discussed in Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print*, 91-4.

or die as a consequence. She is also driven to “sigh” at the stress of it all and, later on, she “makes great moan” when the nurse runs away, leaving her to look after the baby without aid. At one point, she has no alternative but to “pray a peasant for relief”; the lowly locals give her some money, even though “Her speech they could not understand.” In any case, this is a woman for whom actions speak much more loudly than words, and Deloney’s emphasis upon her bravery and resourcefulness leaves us with the feeling that the Duchess is highly articulate, even though she says so little. And the tune to which the ballad was set does some of her talking for her. It was entitled “Queen Dido” and it derived from *A Proper Ballad, Intituled, The Wandring Prince of Troy*, which told the story of Dido and Aeneas.³⁵ This was an exceptionally well-known song, number one in our chart, and the tune surely carried pertinent associations both with aristocratic femininity and with the exile experienced by Aeneas. The two songs set to the same tune continued to bounce echoes off one another as they both maintained their popularity throughout the seventeenth century. The Duchess of Suffolk tended to keep her mouth shut but there is not much doubt that, through the performance of her ballad across many decades, she spoke.

Deloney’s heroine is theoretically framed and contained by the husband and the infant son with whom she travels, but the fact that the two male characters are featured so sparingly enables her to be much more the maker of her own destiny than was the character presented by Foxe. The specially-drawn woodcut pictures that usually illustrated later broadside editions of the song may even suggest a measure of male concern over the extent to which the Duchess dominates the song (Picture 1). Although Deloney’s text, and the tune he presumably selected, placed her at the heart of matters, the pictures that were subsequently added clearly present her husband as the leading light. In the first woodcut, he boldly leads the Duchess and her nurse towards the English coast while a less fortunate Protestant goes up in flames behind them. In the second, he uses a giant set of ecclesiastical keys to beat up an irritating German sexton, while his wife dandles the baby in the relative comfort of a nearby church porch. In the ballad’s text, the duke finally achieves a moment of glory by making a “gallant speech” in Latin that causes a discerning doctor to realise that the English visitors are not quite what they seem. But it is the Duchess whom he suddenly recognises – such is her fame – and the only lines of direct speech to be voiced by a man in the ballad announce this fact to the listening company: “Behold within your sight, quoth he,/ A Princesse of most high degree.”

The women in *A Most Sweet Song of an English Merchant* are similarly spirited and far more talkative. They are, like Grissell and Rosamund, presented almost entirely in terms of their relationships to men, but in their active response to a desperate situation their closer affinity is to

³⁵ See EBBA 20262, 20276, 31770, 31771, 31866, 34056, 34057. For the tune, see Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, 587-90.

the Duchess of Suffolk. In this case, the title emphasises a man, and the central male character voices 60 of the 92 lines of direct speech, leaving the women with 32 (35%). The lengthy refrain, however, highlights femininity, and it sounds nineteen times in a full rendition of the song:

A sweet thing is love,
It rules both heart and mind:
There is no comfort in this world
to women that are kind.³⁶

This is a conventional message, of course, but it is also positive in that it draws attention to female generosity of spirit as a defining characteristic, while noting that it can lead to inconsolability. In actual fact, the women in the ballad are eventually rewarded for their kindness, and the conclusion is a happy one. In short, an English merchant is condemned to execution in Emden for a murdering a man with whom he has quarrelled. His fundamental goodness is, however, apparent to all, particularly the young women of the town. They plead for his life, exploiting a local legal principle in order to save him from losing his head. He is at first unconvinced but, after a while, he gratefully marries the most insistent and resourceful of the women and travels home to England with her. This was another very popular ballad, licensed with the Stationers' Company in 1594 and reprinted throughout the seventeenth century, usually with a woodcut that featured a woman at its very centre.³⁷ The tune was also a major success in its own right and it provided the musical setting for at least seventeen other ballads.³⁸ Deloney's "sweet song" also provides further evidence of his instinct and capacity for creating and developing distinctive female voices.

Deloney describes the merchant's arrival at the place assigned for his execution, and a collective voice is devised to establish the compassionate disposition of the female portion of the watching crowd: "All women said great pity 'twas,/ So sweet a man should die." When he addresses the audience, their anguish deepens. The merchant expresses remorse and leaves gifts to the widow and children of the man whom he has killed, asking in return only that "They will speake well of Englishmen,/ though I have done amisse." Responding to his voice, the women explain that, according to local law, they can halt the execution, "If you in lieu of our good will,/ will grant to us

³⁶ The quotations in this section are from *A Most Sweet Song of an English Merchant* (mid-seventeenth century), EBBA 30069 (see also EBBA 20259, 31745, 31746, 31747, 33722, 35410).

³⁷ Hyder E. Rollins, *An Analytical Index to the Ballad-Entries (1557-1709) in the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London* (Hatboro, 1967), nos. 1816, 1817, 2296. For the picture, see EBBA 30069.

³⁸ The melody's interesting career is discussed in Una McIlvenna, "The Rich Merchant Man, or, What the Punishment of Greed Sounded Like in Early Modern English Ballads," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2016): 279-99. For a version of the tune, see Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, 602.

your love.” At this point, the collective voice breaks down into its constituent parts but the individual women continue to say the same things:

Brave Englishman, quoth one,
 ‘Tis I will beg thy life:
 Nay, quoth the second, it is I,
 If I must be thy wife:
 ‘Tis I, the third did say;
 Nay, quoth the fourth, ‘tis I:
 So each one after other said,
 still waiting his reply.

This may look to us like meaningless filler but, within the narrative, the transition from collectivity to individuality is pivotal. From this point onwards, the only female voice to be heard belongs to a particularly forthright maiden who decides to take control of the situation, but we understand that she continues to speak for all. She listens to the merchant’s gracious attempts to turn down the multiple offers that have been presented to him, and then she speaks up to delay the execution: “Ah Nay another Damsell cry’d/ sweet Headsman hold thy hand.” Her particular style is to soften words of command with a pleading tone:

Now heare a Maidens plaint,
 Brave Englishman, quoth shee,
 And grant her love for love againe,
 That craves but love of thee:
 I wooe and sue for love,
 That have been wooed ere this,
 Then grant mee love, and therewithall
 she proffers him a kisse.

She declares her willingness to die for him, and he responds with incredulity: “But can it be, hee said,/ That thou dost love me so”? The maiden now delivers a clinching line, demonstrating in the process her pithy intelligence: “ ‘Tis not by long acquaintance sir,/ whereby true love doth grow.” This amounts to a forceful rejection of the conventional wisdom that “hot love is soon cold,” and it seems certain that female desire, though never explicit, is a key component of this song.

Jeanice Brooks has argued that courtly songs of the period avoided direct discussion of female sexuality but, in reception and performance, nevertheless offered aristocratic women “imaginative contexts for the articulation of female desire.”³⁹ Something similar might be said of Deloney’s ballad. The merchant is persuaded by the woman’s words, convinced that “More love cannot be showne.” At this point, she swings into action, hurrying off to visit the local duke in order to sort out the paperwork. She departs with a breathless final flourish:

I goe my Love, shee said,
I run, I flye for thee:
And gentle Headsman spare a while,
My Lovers life for me.

Off stage, the duke, like all the other men in the ballad, is won over by the woman’s arguments, and, miraculously, a beheading becomes a wedding. This is a striking success for a young woman whose voice articulates not only loving kindness and a wish to wed but also intelligence, determination and an active disposition (“I wooe and sue for love”). She is defined by her love for a ‘proper man’ but, within the bounds of convention, she also finds space to breathe.

We come next to the first ballad in which a female character voices a majority of the spoken lines (40 from 63, or 63%). Deloney’s song *Of a Prince of England, who wooed the Kings Daughter of France* presents the usual tussle between some of the song’s constituent parts: in the title, the prince leads the way and the princess follows; but the central character in the narrative is very clearly the woman (indeed, the prince dies before the midway point). The song tells the story of a young couple who elope because the King of France disapproves of his daughter’s love for an Englishman. The prince, while waiting in a forest for the arrival of his beloved, is mugged and killed. The princess, disguised as a poor woman, finds his body, and the remainder of the ballad describes her subsequent adventures: rather than go back to court, she asks a forester to help find work for her as a servant; he falls in love with her and they marry; ultimately, her true identity is revealed and a wholesome rapprochement with the king occurs. The ballad appeared in *The Garland of Good Will*, and numerous broadside editions were published throughout the early modern period.⁴⁰

Deloney, as usual, deploys direct speech in order to bring the princess to life and open up to us the imagined workings of her mind. She uses her voice flexibly, responding with skill to the

³⁹ Jeanice Brooks, “Chivalric Romance, Courtly Love, and Courtly Song: Female Vocality and Feminine Desire in the World of Amadis de Gaule,” in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women*, ed. LaMay, 63-95.

⁴⁰ The quotations are from D[eloney], *Garland of Good Will*, D5v-E1v. Broad sides appeared under various titles, including *An Excellent Ballad of a Prince of Englands Courtship to the King of France’s Daughter* (EBBA 20244, 30068, 31397, 31794, 33333, 35964).

different but always difficult situations in which she finds herself. In the first phase of the ballad, she runs away from home and searches for her sweetheart in the forest where they have arranged to meet. As she seeks him, defiance of her father is superseded by devoted deference to her lover, but the line "Sweet I come unto thee" is followed by another that seems to indicate her enduring will to drive the action for herself: "Sweet I come to woe thee" (the slippage between "woo" and "woe" is also portentous). Eventually, she finds her lover, drawn by the sound of his dying words - she "knew his voice" - and expresses anguished tenderness upon realising that he is dead. Tears run down her cheeks, "While she cryed out My darling,/ O would that I had dyed for thee." She pleads hopelessly with the body, begging for the restoration of the prince's voice:

Speak faire Prince to me,
One sweet word of comfort give:
Lift up thy faire eyes,
Listen to my cryes,
thinke in what great griefe I live.

Expressions of despair, however, are soon replaced by statements of proud defiance and brave intent:

To my Fathers Court
Will I never wander,
But some service take,
where I might placed be.

When approached by a comely forester, the princess adopts a pleading tone both to seek help and to tell a tactical untruth about the identity of the corpse: "Harder hap did never,/ Chance to maiden ever,/ here lies slaine my Brother deare." Successfully, she implores the forester to recognise her potential as a dutiful servant. "Paines I will not spare," she assures him, "But will do my duty." "Ease me of my care," she asks, and "help my extreme need." Interestingly, she sounds strong and resourceful when speaking to herself but deferential and dependent when addressing men. The strategy works, and she eventually builds a new life as the forester's wife (they have seven children). Only at the end of the song does she speak again and once again there is a tactical dimension to her words. When the King happens to meet her and remarks that she reminds him of his lost child, she plays the dutiful daughter with voice and body: "I am that Child (quoth she)/ Falling on her knee,/"

pardon me my Sovereigne Liege.” This moment marks the reassertion of proper patriarchy, and the princess and her forester-husband are instantly rewarded. Yet the hurried conclusion cannot eradicate the impression that this is a woman who has made her own way in the world despite being defined in relation to three men: a sweetheart, a husband and a father. Like the Duchess of Suffolk, this brave princess transcends her subjugated status without explicitly rejecting it. The tune, “Crimson Velvet,” once again has a mild modifying effect. It was shared with another successful ballad featuring an aristocratic wife who endures the cruelties of a philandering husband without complaint.⁴¹ The long and complex structure of the tune meant that it was only rarely used for other ballads, and it seems likely that each of these two songs reminded many listeners of the other. Crimson velvet was also the cloth of ladies, and the tune, like the fabric, formed a link between these two contrasting women. In the case of the French princess, the melody may have softened any impression that she was prone to displays of inappropriate independence while also augmenting audience sympathy.

The heroine presented in *The Spanish Ladies Love* is a perplexed prisoner at the start of the song and a heartbroken nun by the end. Despite this troublesome trajectory, it is probably the most buoyant of Deloney’s hit ballads, partly on account of its infectious tune. The centrality of the female character is written into the title and echoed in the melody, which subsequently became known as “The Spanish Lady.” Furthermore, the woodcut picture that appears on later broadside editions features one of her key gestures, and she delivers 78 of the 108 spoken lines (72%). The opening verse also seems to place her firmly in charge: “Will you heare a Spanish Lady/ how she wooed an Englishman” (women who wooed evidently worked well for Deloney). What follows is the story of a high-born woman who is captured in an English raid and placed in the custody of a handsome English sea captain (the song appears to have been registered as early as 1586). As other songs have already made clear, Deloney exploited the allure of exotic continental heroines for his consumers, skilfully avoiding the danger of seeming unpatriotic by having them choose Englishmen over the inferior candidates available in their own countries. The Spanish Lady, guided by Deloney, duly plays her role. She declares her love and seeks to persuade the captain that they should be together. He warns that a relationship between them is not a good idea for various reasons and eventually persuades her to withdraw her suggestion. She obliges, and they part amicably. The ballad was published in *The Garland of Good Will* and in numerous broadside editions from the

⁴¹ *Constance of Cleveland* (licensed in 1603 but surviving copies are later). For the tune, see Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, 141-2.

Elizabethan period right through to the nineteenth century.⁴² It also seems to have spawned a dubious Lincolnshire legend that endures to this day, and there is a plot-line in *The Sea Hawk*, a movie of 1940 starring Errol Flynn, that bears a close resemblance to the ballad's narrative.⁴³ Clearly, Deloney's topical tale was built to last.

The Spanish Lady's voice is vibrant and varied. She first declares her love for the captain when he prepares to release her, arguing with a nice ear for irony that she would rather remain his prisoner: "Alas then said the Lady gay,/ full woe is me:/ O let me still sustaine this kind/ captivity." The largest part of the ballad presents the conversation between captive and captor, during which the woman's voice is deployed in a number of different ways. Perhaps because she is clearly the social superior in the relationship, she is at times rather forward in her femininity, declaring at one point, "I am lovely, young and tender,/ love is likewise my desert [i.e. dessert]." "To favour him in any thing," we are told, "she was not coy." At other times, however, she is deferential and dependent, offering "to serve thee day and night" and pleading, "Gallant Captaine take some pitie,/ of a Lady in distresse." She is also eager to flatter him by making favourable international comparisons: "Spaniards fraught with jealousie,/ we often find,/ But English men through all the world/ are counted kind." Above all she is utterly devoted and desperate to be with him. She tells him that he has won the hearts of all local women and that she is willing to die for him. She suggests, like Rosamund, that "I will quickly change my selfe,/ if it be so,/ And like a Page Ile follow thee,/ where ere thou go."

The last four verses are heavily dominated by her voice, as she reacts to a suspiciously delayed revelation on the captain's part that he already has a wife at home in England. She is mortified by the announcement and switches abruptly into an apologetic and subservient mode: "Upon my knees I pardon crave,/ for this offence." She insists upon sending her jewels to his wife, "for a token,/ grieving that I was so bold" (the standard woodcut on later editions of the ballad depicts the Lady handing the captain a particularly fine piece). And she states her intention of withdrawing into a life of religious contemplation, a suggestion that Deloney's women, particularly the foreign ones, often make at moments of crisis: "I will spend my dayes in prayer,/ Love and all her lawes defie/ In a Nunnery will I shrewd me/ farre from other company." Finally, she bids him farewell and asks, "Count not Spanish Ladies wanton,/ though to thee my love was bent." The tune that carried the voices of both parties was a bright and merry one that probably served to draw out

⁴² The quotations in this section are from D[eloney], *Garland of Good Will*, H5r-7v. Broad­sides were entitled *The Spanish Ladies Love* (EBBA 20829, 21160, 30844, 32028, 33806, 33809). On licensing, see Rollins, *Analytical Index*, nos. 188, 2508, 2509, 2510.

⁴³ The legend appears to have arisen in the nineteenth century. It claims that the English sea captain was Sir John Bolle and that the ghost of the Spanish Lady regularly sits in a tree near his former house. See Robert Chambers, *The Book of Days*, 2 vols. (London, 1832), vol. 2, 141-2.

the patriotic humour of the song, something that must have been particularly useful (and marketable) in the later years of the sixteenth century when English people watched the seas nervously for Spanish ships. Overall, the Spanish Lady was quite a creation, defined by her devotion to a man but capable of combining it with considerable assertiveness.

The final ballad of the set, *The Lamentation of Master Pages Wife of Plimmouth*, presents Deloney's most articulate female character. As in the songs considered above, the protagonist's personal drama is played out within a field of force generated by men, and she must negotiate a path around the obstacles that are thrown before her. In other ways, however, this song is different. It is the only one written entirely in the first-person and the only one about a convicted criminal. It is also the only one that, in its broadside versions, was never illustrated with a picture. This may be because the sheet was crammed with text, leaving little room for anything else. It actually presented three interrelated songs: two sung by a woman and one by a man. The female voice dominates, delivering 144 of the 188 spoken lines (77%). The imagined words are those of Eulalia Page of Plymouth, who in 1589 conspired with the man she loved, George Strangwidge, to commission the murder of her husband. They were both caught, along with two hired killers, and executed at Barnstaple in Devon.⁴⁴ The songs are presented as the explanatory words of Eulalia and George themselves, "written" shortly before they died. Although these are purportedly works of hand and pen, they were also clearly designed for singing, and the famously sombre tune of "Fortune my Foe" was named. The success of the song can be measured by the frequent editions, one of which attempted to maintain topicality by asserting in its title that the events had actually occurred in 1609 rather than 1589. Deloney's ballad may also have motivated Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker to write a play, now lost, about "Pagge of P[le]moth" in 1599.⁴⁵ It certainly helped to shape other ballads, and later literary references to the case reveal clearly the influence of Deloney's narrative. Martin Randall is surely right to note that the ballad brought to Mistress Page "a measure of folk celebrity."⁴⁶

The voice of Eulalia Page is one of the most interesting that Deloney created. Scholars who write about the representation of husband-killers in this period often argue that most portrayals were "unambivalently condemnatory," commonly emphasising sexual disorder and rebellion against

⁴⁴ The original ballad appeared in the early 1590s but all surviving copies are later. The quotations in this section are from *The Lamentation of Master Pages Wife of Plimmouth* (1609), EBBA 20054. See also EBBA 20787, 30122, 31948, 34043, 34045, 34958, 35477, 35246, 35968, and *The Shirburn Ballads*, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford, 1907), 109-13.

⁴⁵ *Lamentation of Master Pages Wife* (1609), EBBA 20054; *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. Walter W. Greg (London, 1904), 110.

⁴⁶ *A Looking Glasse for Maids* (mid-seventeenth century), EBBA 32063; Henry Goodcole, *The Adultrresses Funeral Day in Flaming, Scorching, and Consuming Fire* (London, 1635), B1r; John Taylor, *The Second Part of the Theatre of Gods Judgments* (London, 1642), 95; *Women and Murder in Early Modern News Pamphlets and Broadside Ballad*, ed. Martin Randall (Aldershot, 2005), xi.

patriarchy. Sympathy for such murderers is said to have been rare.⁴⁷ It has also been acknowledged, however, that Deloney's imagining of Eulalia Page represents an exception.⁴⁸ In his ballad, she is allowed the time and space to develop her case and explain her actions. Furthermore, a comparison with other sources indicates that Deloney created for Eulalia a voice that was calculated to elicit sympathy. Many murder ballads dwelt on the gory details of the crimes or the executions they described, but Deloney omitted all such information. A pamphlet account of the Page case, published around the same time as the ballad, presented a woman who was much more obviously wicked, selfish and deceitful. She attempts to poison her husband before calling in the contract killers, adopting a mode of attack that was associated particularly with women and often regarded as notably reprehensible. And after the assassins have done their terrible deed she tries to evade justice by claiming that her husband's death is due to natural causes.⁴⁹ Deloney neglects to mention any of this, opting instead to devise a voice that calls eloquently for sympathy and understanding.

In the first song, Eulalia's appeal to her audience has several strands. In the second verse, she establishes that she is sorry for her crime and ready to accept justice: "A wife I was that wilfull went awry,/ And for that fault, am here prepar'd to die." Immediately, however, she begins the work of shifting or at least sharing the blame, explaining that her marriage to Page, rather than to her beloved Strangwidge, was a product of someone else's materialist aspiration: "In blooming yeares my fathers greedy minde,/ Against my will a match for me did finde." Page was much older than Eulalia, and "with his age my youth could not agree." She thus tapped into audience knowledge that personal consent was the basis of a match and that parity of age was one important criterion of choice. Eulalia attempted to change her parents' minds, using a range of non-verbal sounds (cries, sighs and sobs) as she did so, but they remained resolute. Pressed into marriage, she developed a physical revulsion at the very sight of her husband. "My legs did loathe," she tells us, "to lodge within his bed." This marks the beginning of her "downefall and decay" as the road to murder opens up in her mind. And just in case the alliteration fails to earn our sympathy, Eulalia here returns briefly to her opening theme of personal repentance, acknowledging openly "That for that deede hell fire is my due." She thus evades the potential objection that she is seeking to minimise her own culpability.

⁴⁷ Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (Ithaca, 1994), 50; *Women and Murder*, ed. Randall, xiii.

⁴⁸ Joy Wiltenburg, "Ballads and the Emotional Life of Crime," in *Ballads and Broad-sides*, ed. Fumerton and Guerrini, 184; *Women and Murder*, ed. Randall, xvii; Wright, *Thomas Deloney*, 40-1.

⁴⁹ *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers* (London, 1591), B2r-4v. Deloney's narrative diverges very significantly from the standard pattern for such tales that is identified in Stuart A. Kane, "Wives with Knives: Early Modern Murder Ballads and the Transgressive Community," *Criticism* 38, no. 2 (1996): 226-7.

Having made this point, Eulalia shifts direction again, thinly disguising renewed criticism of her father and mother as a series of warnings aimed at particular sections of her imagined audience. First, she calls for the attention of “You Parents fond that greedy minded be,” acknowledging that she was bound to obey her own in almost all things, “Yet not to wed where I no love could lay.” She also adds new material to her argument by using the term “force” in connection with her parents’ match-making activities and by claiming a pre-contract: “faith before had made me Strangwidge wife.” Second, she addresses “Devonshire dames, & courteous Cornwall knights,” some of whom have apparently been to visit her in prison. Once again, however, her main message is slipped in after a more general appeal: “Regard my grieve and marke my woefull end,/ And to your Children be a better friend.” Eulalia next speaks directly to George, her lover and fellow convict, urging him not to fear the terrible end that is to come. Finally, she demonstrates a solid understanding of the requirements of a “good death” by appealing to Christ, forgiving the world, and comforting her parents with the confident assertion that in the life to come “I will be full well.” She warns the wives of Plymouth, “let not your hands rebell,” and asks God to bless the queen (the king in later editions). Her very last words, however, remind us of her central point: she asks God to “give all Parents wisdom to foresee,/ The match is marr’d where minds doe not agree.”

Eulalia’s second song covers much the same ground but adds a stronger declaration of her devotion to George (“His love in me so deep a roote did take,/ I could have gone a begging for his sake”). George’s own song is sandwiched in between the two contributions from his lover. Essentially, George follows Eulalia’s line of argument, though he addresses her father man-to-man and is consequently more forthright in labelling him the “cause of my committed crime.” As a man, he also feels bound to exonerate Eulalia of all blame for the murder on the grounds that she was motivated only by love for him. The pamphlet account of the case suggests that George actually tried to stop the murder at the last minute but Deloney makes no mention of this incident.⁵⁰ He, like the characters he channels, seems wholly intent on presenting Eulalia Page, a convicted murderer, in the warmest light possible. Deloney imagined her voice in a thoroughly distinctive manner, and the fact that he did so probably helps to account for the fact that Eulalia is the only husband-killer in our list of 120 best-selling ballads.

Throughout Eulalia’s songs, there is a rich interplay between the inward and outward, with the voice functioning as the conduit through which one becomes the other. “Though wealthy Page possest my outward part,” she tells us, “George Strangwidge still was lodged in my heart.” And when her outward eye found his physical appearance loathsome, “My heart did grudge against him inwardly.” At numerous points in the ballad, Eulalia’s eye and body participate in a dangerous

⁵⁰ *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers*, B4r.

dialogue with her fancy, will, mind, heart and conscience. Her mediating voice is enhanced by a melody that was simple in structure but complex in associations. “Fortune my foe” began life as a the setting for an early Elizabethan love-song, and it clearly retained this romantic resonance when Deloney chose it. As time passed, however, the tune also gathered new associations – partly from this very ballad - with the “last dying speeches” of criminals and with songs presenting heavy moral advice. By the middle of the seventeenth century these resonances were probably stronger than the original romance of the melody.⁵¹ This raises the interesting possibility that a performance of the *Lamentation* in the 1690s may have felt rather different from a rendition in the 1590s because of the journey that the tune had travelled during the intervening century. At all points along the way, it added rich undertones to the voice of Eulalia Page.

Deloney’s seven super-songs are heavily preoccupied with women and their voices. He presents a wide variety of types, covering the full spectrum from a wife so passive that she relinquishes her children to a wife so active that she extinguishes her husband. In between, he dreams up voices for a godly duchess, an amorous German maiden, a delectable royal concubine, a plucky princess and a somewhat forward Spanish aristocrat. The success of the songs indicates that Deloney was a ventriloquizing virtuoso, more successful than any other writer in creating women who appealed to the purchasing public. The vocal modes employed by his women are as varied as their backgrounds. According to mood and also to need, their voices are occasionally mute but more often some combination of pleading, thoughtful, angry, enthusiastic, longing, loving, assertive, desperate, deferential, defiant, apologetic, devout and instructive. It is also worth reiterating that no other author of best-selling ballads used female voices to a comparable degree. Despite the variety of representations within this body of work, however, there were also a number of common features. Deloney and presumably his consumers were drawn to women who fell in love or married across boundaries imposed by class, morality and nationality. His women, though often notably independent of spirit, are also characteristically defined and confined by their relationships with men. They express themselves with determination and invention, but they do so within the framework imposed by patriarchy. All of them are framed by some combination of husband, father, governor, king, lover and son. And just as they are defined by these relationships, so they suffer as a

⁵¹ For the tune, see Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, 227. Its history in the period is surveyed in Christopher Marsh, “ ‘Fortune My Foe’: The Circulation of an English Super-Tune,” in *Identity, Intertextuality and Performance in Early Modern Song Culture*, ed. Dieuwke van der Poel, Louis Peter Grijp and Wim van Anrooij (Leiden, 2016), 308-30.

consequence. Indeed, all of the ballads are about the restrictions with which women lived. Crucially, however, most of the female characters *respond* to these restrictions, striving to find a way of making them manageable. Their tactics vary, and the results are mixed too: of the seven featured women, four emerge happy, two die and one ends up in a convent. Notably, only two of them – Grissell and Rosamund – are fundamentally passive characters, and there is always the possibility that Grissell’s passivity was so extreme that it should be understood as a species of action. She was playing a long game and, unlike the murdering Mistress Page, she lived to speak another day.

The final characteristic that unites Deloney’s women despite their variety is the evident sympathy with which their personalities and voices were represented. This seems particularly notable, given the emphasis recently placed by scholars on misogyny and male anxiety as dominant features of popular literary culture.⁵² The differences between Deloney’s ballads and other versions of the same tales establish beyond doubt that his strategy was to concentrate on representing women who were, for one reason or another, either admirable or deserving of sympathy. Being a man of the Elizabethan age, he probably agreed with Bishop Aylmer that “women were of two sorts,” either wise, learned, discreet and constant, or fond, foolish, wanton, wavering, witless, feeble, careless, rash and evil-tongued.⁵³ Deloney’s most successful ballads, however, portray the former type – a minority in Aylmer’s view – to the near exclusion of the latter. Deloney’s women were praised mainly for more or less orthodox female qualities, though some of them were apparently permitted to carry one or two more dubious attributes without sacrificing sympathy. Most of them were rather more spirited than we might have expected. One defied her royal father, another led her family into exile, and the most articulate of them all murdered her own husband.

It is difficult to know whether Deloney was driven primarily by a sympathy for the opposite sex – he also wrote “A Song in praise of women” – or by an eye for the main chance during an economic crisis. Either way, it can surely be assumed that these ballads appealed particularly, though not exclusively, to women. In all likelihood, purchases by women played a disproportionate role in sending a selection of his songs up the chart, and the reasons for their appeal may have been as varied as everything else about them. Grissell and the others spoke in verse, but they used common language that was accessible to all, and one wonders whether Deloney’s speech-rich style

⁵² See, for example, Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex, and Marriage* (London, 1999), 104, 111, 193-4; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996), 186-7, 207-08, 223; Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England, 1550-1750* (London, 1998), 24; Kirilka Stavreva, *Words like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England* (Lincoln, 2015), 46-8; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven, 1995), 6-8, 16-19, 27, 117, 230; *Women and Murder*, ed. Randall, xiii; Susan Amussen, “The Gendering of Popular Culture in Early Modern England,” in *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke, 1995), 50; Kane, “Wives with Knives”.

⁵³ Cited by Chilton Latham Powell, *English Domestic Relations 1487-1653* (New York, 1972), 147.

may have appealed to women who had frequently been told that words, rather than deeds, were their particular province (though we should not forget that the Duchess of Suffolk said little but did much). The songs also represented women facing difficulties that felt familiar but that were also magnified, enhanced and rendered extreme or exotic. Deloney's women were both ordinary and extraordinary. His ballads may have helped women to wrestle with the problems caused by their unequal status. Deloney's female voices struck chords in commonplace lives but they also offered the prospect of a temporary escape from mundane normality. Through reading and rendition, an ordinary woman could become for a time a duchess, a concubine or a killer (and without negative consequences). Work on female reading habits in our own age also emphasises the value of escape to the many women who read romantic fiction.⁵⁴ We might also note the manner in which songs can create their own special sense of time and space, thus helping performers and listeners to leave "reality" behind, for a while at least.⁵⁵ A ballad was a malleable product that could be appropriated through performance, broken down and reconfigured, twisted into something new through tone of voice, accompanying gestures and the selectivity of memory (the work of folksong collectors suggests that many broadside ballads were radically reduced in length as they passed into oral tradition). The composer, Thomas Campion, was clearly aware that there were risks here as well as benefits: in one preface, he told readers, "all these Songs are mine if you expresse them well, otherwise they are your own."⁵⁶ Although Deloney was a man, the female voices he created could be processed and possessed by women.

It is also likely that female taste was a key influence over his creative output. Certainly, evidence relating to English plays in the later seventeenth century indicates that female consumers could be vociferous in communicating their wishes to playwrights. Moreover, they expressed a particular liking for exactly the kind of sympathetically-imagined female characters that appear in Deloney's hit songs. The author Thomas D'Urfey, who wrote both plays and ballads, called women "that essential part of the audience," and one playwright advised others, "make your Ladies Characters vertuous whatere you do."⁵⁷ Deloney, it seems, had realised the value of this approach one hundred years earlier.

Of course, it would be misguided to suggest that Deloney's fictional women did not appeal to men. Deloney's particular gift may well have been to attract one half of the population without

⁵⁴ Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 86-118.

⁵⁵ On the ways in which song suspends normal rules, see Heather Dubrow, " 'I Take Pleasure in Singing, Sir': Towards an Interpretation of Shakespearean Song," in *"This Earthly Stage": World and Stage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Brett D. Hirsch and Christopher Worthan (Turnhout, 2010), 115-30.

⁵⁶ Cited by Trudell, "Performing Women," 28.

⁵⁷ Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse. Images of Women and Women Dramatists 1642-1737* (New York, 1988), 33-41.

offending the other.⁵⁸ England's bachelors, husbands and fathers must have enjoyed his ballads too even if they listened with their ears cocked in a different direction. Male consumers could note with satisfaction that Grissell never bit back or that Eulalia Page was duly executed for killing her husband. They may have felt aroused by Rosamund's adulterous confinement or the romantic forwardness of the maiden of Emden and the lady of Spain. Men needed escapist fantasies too. If these three women caused men anxiety, it is unlikely to have been severe, given that the first was put to death, the second married a "proper man" and the third retired to a convent. Most of these songs granted time and space to female voices, but it is noticeable that the endings tended to flatter men by restoring or reinforcing patriarchal orthodoxy. Deloney both liberated and contained his female protagonists. The potential tension between the two approaches is nicely revealed at the conclusion of *The Spanish Ladies Love*. The woman is not given a name but her voice dominates the last four verses, within which she delivers 30 out of 32 spoken lines. She uses the privilege, however, to express remorse for being "so bold" and to wish the English captain well with the words, "Joy and true prosperity/ remain with thee." Deloney may have been trying to settle things down after the assertive femininity of the earlier part of the song, and he therefore reserved the very last two lines for the man: "The like fall to thy share,/ most fair Lady." In performance, the remark feels almost superfluous, and it hardly produces the resounding conclusion that the song deserves. Deloney clearly felt the need to sign off with a male voice, but his gallant soldier – perhaps mesmerised by the Lady's long and eloquent apology – goes out with a whimper rather than a bang.

Christopher Marsh (5 August 2017)

⁵⁸ There are excellent insights on the manner in which songs could embody rival gender interests in Judith M. Bennett, "Ventriloquisms: When Maidens Speak in English Songs, c. 1300-1550," in *Medieval Woman's Song. Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen (Philadelphia, 2002), 187-204.